

Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations: Matching Strategy to Threat

by

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Abstract

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Mexico and the United States share a long social, cultural, political, economic and geographic history. Unfortunately, the two countries also share a significant national security threat, that of drug trafficking organizations (DTO). DTOs are extremely violent organizations that are the largest suppliers of illegal drugs to Americans. The ends, ways and means of DTOs have significant negative implications on both countries. While DTOs often operate in the same manner as terrorist and insurgent groups, the U.S. government identifies DTOs as transnational criminal organizations due to the fact that the DTOs ends are financial as opposed to ideological or political. Using an interagency, or “whole of government”, strategy, the U.S. government conducts a bilateral campaign aimed at reducing the affects of DTOs. Finally, this approach best incorporates all elements of national power aimed at reducing the demand for illegal drugs and countering the threat from DTOs to one manageable at the lowest levels of government.

Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations: Matching Strategy to Threat

Organized criminal organizations, terror groups, and insurgents have at least one trait in common: the use of violence as one of multiple ways to attain their stated ends.¹ The ends for an organized crime organization are different from the ends for a terrorist group, financial as opposed to ideology for example. These differences in ends warrant different strategies by the United States designed to stop the distinct organizations, their attendant violence, and negative effects on the U.S. population. Despite statements by security and policy experts as well as U.S. government officials describing drug cartel violence in Mexico as an insurgency or terrorism,² the United States defines cartels, known as Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO), as criminal organizations. In order to counter DTO effects on American citizens, the U.S. government developed and implemented a balanced strategy that utilizes the diplomatic, information, military, and economic elements of national power.³ Additionally, the strategy incorporates legal, law enforcement, and intelligence means to provide a whole of government approach to ensure the protection of U.S. enduring and national interests.

The negative impacts of Mexican DTOs on the United States' national security, economy, and lives of countless Americans are felt daily across the U.S. The 2010 National Security Strategy identifies safeguarding American citizens as the first of America's enduring interests. Additionally, the strategy states that transnational criminal threats, also called Transnational Organized Crime (TOC), of which DTOs are a form, pose "a significant national security challenge to the United States and all of our partner countries."⁴ The U.S. Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime states these criminal networks are growing and diversifying into multi-dimensional threats to U.S. national interests.⁵

The 2011 Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime identifies key regions in which DTOs affect the safety, health, institutions, and wallet of Americas. Among others, the regions linked to DTOs include: 1) corruption in Mexico; 2) crime-terror-insurgency nexus; 3) expansion of drug trafficking; and 4) trafficking of weapons and persons.⁶ For the scope of this paper, the primary focus is on drug trafficking, although later discussions of strategy and use of the elements of national power reflect ways to tackle each of these areas.

According to the Department of Justice's National Drug Intelligence Center, in 2009-2010 Mexican DTOs had a presence in more than 1000 American cities.⁷ Although the U.S. government conducts an interagency, or "whole of government" strategy to halt the flow of illegal drugs along the Mexico-U.S. border,⁸ Mexican-based DTOs continue to provide the majority of illicit drugs to U.S. consumers.⁹ The economic impact of drug trafficking and use in the U.S. is estimated at close to \$200 billion annually,¹⁰ and the use of illicit drugs in the U.S. continues to rise despite the nearly \$1 trillion spent fighting the war on drugs since the war's inception in 1971.¹¹

The U.S. is involved on many levels to halt DTO's access and impacts to and within the U.S. From an estimated \$330 million through the Merida Initiative in 2012¹², to \$33 million allocated by Congress in 2012¹³, to Department of Defense estimates of an additional \$100 million in 2012¹⁴, the U.S. government is committed to this effort. But is the U.S. implementing the correct strategy to counter the threat and effects from DTOs, drugs, and the attendant violence on America?

While DTOs are a subset of transnational criminal organizations, with criminal being the key word, there is debate on how to label DTOs. For example, former

Secretary of State Clinton has compared DTO actions to an insurgency.¹⁵ Are DTOs criminal organizations, terrorists groups, or insurgents, or do they possess characteristics and attributes found in each of these groups? Is it even important to make a distinction and classify DTOs as a particular type of organization? The intent of this paper is to show that it is vital to correctly define DTOs in order to implement the correct strategy. Further, the aim is to argue the U.S. government has in fact accurately defined DTOs as criminal organizations and subsequently developed and implemented the correct strategy to reduce their effects, using all elements of national power to counter DTOs.

In order to analyze and support this conclusion, this paper: 1) provides an assessment of why the relationship between Mexico and the U.S. is important; 2) provides a review of the effects of Mexican DTOs in America; 3) provides definitions of and discussion on the differences between organized crime, terrorism, and insurgencies; 4) reviews the U.S. Strategy to Counter Transnational Organized Crime and the National Drug Control Policy; 5) discusses the Merida Initiative and other non-Merida funding sources for countering DTOs and drugs in America; 6) provides analysis of why the current strategies are the correct strategies; 7) provides recommendations on how to ensure the current strategies continue to meet the U.S. ends. Before defining and identifying what exactly a DTOs is and reviewing U.S. strategy, it is necessary to understand the connection between Mexico and the U.S. as well as the impacts that DTOs have within the U.S.

Why Mexico?

The ties between Mexico and the United States go well beyond the shared history of independence, war, occupation, raids,¹⁶ family ties, and heritage. Issues ranging from national security to the environment and migration are complex issues that demand involvement at the most senior levels of both governments. The most obvious connection between the two countries is the shared, porous 2000-mile border that continues to provide a path for those seeking a new life in America. Unfortunately, the border region, particularly on the Mexican side, resembles the Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan where just finding the border is not an easy task. In many areas along the border the only demarcation between the two countries is a farmer's barbed wire fence. Covering 2000 miles of a remote border is a daunting task for the U.S. government and local authorities. With a border that in some places is hard to locate and even harder to completely protect, DTOs turn to multiple methods, such as tunnels and ultralight aircraft¹⁷, in their effort to move illicit drugs, humans, cash, and weapons across the border.

An increasing concern of a porous border and DTOs effectiveness at crossing undetected is the nexus between international terror organizations and DTOs. The Drug Enforcement Administration's 2013 Performance Budget describes a nexus between the porous international border and the present trafficking routes used by the DTOs to move personnel, money, weapons, and potentially, worst case, weapons of mass destruction. Considering the gravity of the threat, there is a compelling need for the agency to work with authorities on both sides of the border, but especially with Mexican authorities to reduce the threat. Department of Homeland Defense Secretary Janet Napolitano commented on the concern of DTOs affiliating with a group such as Al

Qaeda and that her department was concerned of the possibility.¹⁸ Although there is little hard intelligence suggesting cooperation among and between DTOs and terrorist organizations, and despite the liabilities that DTOs would incur due to increased scrutiny were they to align themselves with terrorist organizations, the negative consequences of such affiliations are too great to ignore. The strongest case against the possibilities of greater cooperation between terrorist groups and DTOs concerns the negative impact joining efforts would have on the bottom line for DTOs. DTOs should appreciate that facilitating a terror organization's movement of people, money, or weapons into the U.S. would likely bring even more attention and interest on their operations, and most certainly increased effort to stop DTO operations. One must consider that DTOs have no interest in decreasing their financial bottom line, an almost certain result of facilitating terrorists. It is the trafficking of drugs, as well as weapons, cash, and people, that endures as the primary threat to U.S. interests.

The illegal drugs DTOs traffic into America and associated violence cause significant financial and social harm to Americans and link directly to U.S. enduring interest of safeguarding Americans, a strong economy, and universal values.¹⁹ The economic and social statistics are staggering. When one looks at the numbers, with one million Americans living in Mexico, another 10 million Americans visiting Mexico annually, 18,000 U.S. companies operating in Mexico, and \$145 billion invested by U.S. companies in Mexico over the last decade²⁰, the economic importance of strong relations with Mexico is abundantly clear. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's *Foreign Trade Statistics*, the United States and Mexico traded \$138 billion worth of goods in 2009, third only behind Canada and China.²¹ Total trade between the two

countries in 2011 was \$500 billion, with the U.S. exporting \$224 billion worth of goods and services to Mexico.²² In 2012, trade between the two countries equaled more than \$1 billion per day.²³ By 2020 Mexico is expected to be one of the world's top ten largest economies.²⁴ With the U.S. economy on a slow recovery, maintaining strong economic ties with Mexico may be more important now than ever before. Maintaining the economic relationship also requires a strong security partnership capable of identifying, stopping or fighting the threats. On the negative side, the economic and social impacts to Americans are just as staggering.

Including worker productivity losses, crime-related costs, and health care costs, illegal drug use in America cost the U.S. taxpayer \$193 billion in 2007.²⁵ While drug related violence in the U.S. is difficult to link directly to DTOs, a link that can be made is between DTOs and gangs in American cities. For instance, in Chicago, the Drug Enforcement Administration estimates that Chicago's 100,000 gang members provide the perfect network for the Sinaloa Cartel to move heroin and methamphetamine²⁶, and this is just one of the aforementioned 1000 cities where DTOs maintain some form of presence within the U.S. On the surface it may appear that for DTOs to establish and maintain an organization capable of such negative transnational effects, their home base of Mexico must either be a failed or failing state, which would and should be a serious concern for U.S. security.

Although the U.S. does not have an official definition of what constitutes a failed state, there is some consensus among the international community on how to determine if a state has failed or is failing. The Fund for Peace uses twelve indicators of state vulnerability, among which are massive movement of refugees, sharp and/or severe

economic decline, and criminalization of the state.²⁷ Further, the International Committee for the Red Cross describes a failed state as one in which there is no internal law and order, an inability to represent the state on the international level, and an inability to exercise legal capacity.²⁸ The 2008 Joint Forces Command's *Joint Operating Environment* voices concern over the consequences of Mexico failing as a state.²⁹ When one analyzes the many factors that, if present, suggest the failure of a state, and if one looks beyond the violence along the border, Mexico does not appear to be failed or failing. With increased public education enrollment, increased life expectancy, a solid representative government democratically elected, a professional security force³⁰, and a strengthening economy, it is difficult to view or forecast Mexico as a failed or failing state. Those conclusions notwithstanding, national security concerns regarding the financial and social impacts of DTOs on America require a strategy implementation that includes continued cooperation with Mexico to halt the affects of DTOs. In order to develop and implement the right strategy the U.S. must first define the cartels and their violent actions.

Categorizing DTOs

It is necessary to first describe different categories cartels may be classified within in order to best determine how to develop and implement strategies toward reducing their threat to U.S. national interests and security. The distinction is important as the U.S. develops different response options to combat terrorists or insurgents than it does to combat organized crime.³¹ Robert Bunker describes five fields of security studies in which cartels are studied: Gangs, Organized Crime, Terrorism, Insurgency, and Future Warfare³². For the scope of this paper, the focus is on insurgency, terrorism, and the organized crime syndicate.

In 2010, then-Secretary of State Clinton likened Mexican drug cartel activity to an insurgency.³³ The comment was subsequently withdrawn after being dismissed by senior Mexican officials, but the classification of the violence in Mexico as an insurgency by a senior U.S. official could automatically direct policy and strategy discussions toward options with a heavy military component. Words are important, and even likening what is happening in Mexico to an insurgency can have significant political consequences. The importance of the word insurgency when discussing Mexican drug cartels is significant, especially when one considers the U.S. government's definition of the term and how the U.S. could respond to an insurgency on its border. Joint Publication 1-02 defines insurgency as "the organized use of subversion and violence by a group or movement that seeks to overthrow or force change of governing authority."³⁴ When viewed in the context of recent U.S. military deployments to counter insurgencies affecting national interests and the historical sovereignty issues between the two countries, negative reaction to the Secretary of State's description of the cartels as an insurgency is easy to understand. With hundreds of thousands of troops deployed over the last decade to Afghanistan and Iraq, would the U.S. soon take unilateral military action into Mexico to protect national interests?

Evidence does not point to DTOs trying to overthrow Mexican authority, rather their intent is to create freedom of movement for trafficking through Mexico and into the U.S., not replace the Mexican government.³⁵ Without a doubt there are areas of Mexico, particularly along the U.S.-Mexico border, where the Mexican government and security forces are not in control, but certainly not the entire country or large populated regions. Gaining control of these areas to replace the Mexican government is not the DTOs

objective, rather their efforts are designed to intimidate the government and ensure operational freedom to continue their criminal enterprise. If DTOs were a true insurgent organization, their focus would be on removing or reducing the Mexican government's effectiveness to a point where the cartels could step in as either a shadow or elected government. Rather, the cartels financial ends are simply facilitated by violent ways that have no political end but often resemble terror tactics.

Cartel violence often closely resembles terrorism, which may be defined as the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies.³⁶ And like an insurgency, terrorism is usually linked to political ends. Persistent press reports of beheadings, mass burials, violence against elected officials, security personnel, and the population read like reports of Al Qaeda in Iraq or the Taliban in Afghanistan. DTOs resort to these violent acts for financial gain, not ideological or political ends, and are most often directed against other cartels.³⁷ Additionally, as Dr. Paul Kan states, the ideological or political motivations of insurgents and terrorists often tend to support negotiations at some point in a conflict.³⁸ With DTOs ends aligned with financial gain and not political positioning, negotiation is not an option. Thus, DTOs more closely resemble organized crime organizations, albeit ones whose violent actions may resemble an insurgency or terrorist organization.

With DTOs ends aligned with financial gain instead of political or ideological ends, it appears that DTOs fit better in the classification of organized crime, both as who they are and what they do. Organized crime is defined by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as "any group having some manner of a formalized structure and whose primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities."³⁹ Jay Albanese defines

organized crime as “a continuing criminal enterprise that rationally works to profit from illicit activities that are often in great public demand.”⁴⁰ Both definitions further describe the threat or use of force and corruption as the way in which the organization maintains its existence. The National Drug Threat Assessment of 2009 identified Mexican-based DTOs as “the greatest organized crime threat to the United States.”⁴¹ DTOs ways are similar to insurgents and terror groups and their means are often better than the local and national security forces, but their ends have nothing to do with a desire to gain political control. By defining DTOs as criminal organizations and sharing responsibility with Mexico for the presence, problems associated with, and removal of DTOs, the U.S. has been able to develop and implement long-term strategy that balances ends, ways, and means.

Current U.S. Strategy

The two base documents detailing U.S. strategy to reduce effects of DTOs are the 2011 Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime and the 2012 National Drug Control Strategy.

The 2011 Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) sets the stage for defining DTOs as criminal organizations by stating that while TOC, a category in which DTOs fall within, use violence as a way to protect and further their business and attempt to influence government, financial gain is their end.⁴² The ends of the U.S. are to reduce TOC, and in turn reduce DTOs, from a threat to national security to one that local and regional officials are able to handle on the level of public safety.⁴³

The Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime has five policy objectives: 1) protect Americans and partners from harm perpetrated by criminal organizations; 2) strengthen partner’s governance and transparency; break ties

between states and criminal organizations; 3) reduce criminal organization's economic power; 4) target crime infrastructure and break link between criminal organizations and terrorists; and 5) build global, public-private consensus to defeat criminal organizations.⁴⁴

Ultimately, in order to defeat DTOs, the strategy is designed to ensure the global community is fully aware of and ready to counter the threats they pose. Moreover, through various ways the strategy seeks to deprive DTOs of their means, and reduce the overall threat DTOs are able to pose.⁴⁵ Additionally, the U.S. is establishing an interagency Threat Mitigating Working Group to provide a whole of government approach to address numerous types of threats that DTOs pose.⁴⁶ This working group is designed to integrate and synchronize all elements of national power.

The first priority action for the strategy is acknowledging that the U.S. shares responsibility for illegal drugs and drug violence in the U.S. and Mexico.⁴⁷ The strategy states that demand for illegal drugs within the U.S. is a major driver for the existence of DTOs. As discussed below, stopping the demand for illegal drugs is designed to ultimately drive down the supply coming into the U.S. Additionally, the strategy emphasizes the U.S. effort to reduce the flow of illegal weapons from the U.S. into Mexico. These weapons allow the DTOs to hold and grow power and influence over the population, government, and security forces. Without the flow of U.S. weapons DTOs will be unable to maintain their current levels of violence. Without the capacity for extreme levels of violence, the power and influence that DTOs wield over the people and government decreases, as well as their ability to maintain current levels of trafficking. Finally, the strategy puts in place efforts to work with Mexican officials to

combat corruption on both sides of the border, as well as enhance law enforcement capabilities and strengthen the rule of law within Mexico.⁴⁸

The second priority action of the strategy is to enhance intelligence and information sharing.⁴⁹ This starts internally to the U.S. and expands out to include sharing of intelligence and information with Mexico. The intent is Mexico and the U.S. share the same common operating picture with regard to DTO operations on both sides of the border. The strategy makes it possible for organizations such as the Drug Enforcement Administration-led Special Operations Division, including Federal law enforcement agencies, Department of Defense, the U.S. Intelligence Community, and international law enforcement agencies, to cooperate in attacks on the DTOs command and control capabilities.⁵⁰

The third priority action⁵¹ is to protect the financial system against DTOs. For the fight against DTOs, the focus of this action is to identify and stop the ways in which DTOs move, hide and increase profits from drug trafficking. Additionally, emphasis is placed on working with the private sector to assist in identifying and stopping DTOs movement and hiding of drug profits.

The fourth priority action is to strengthen investigations, interdiction, and prosecutions through collaborative targeting of DTOs.⁵² Where lethal targeting of DTO leadership through military or law enforcement means generally focuses on one target at a time, this priority action aims criminal investigations at an entire criminal network.⁵³ With regard to interdiction, the strategy is designed to hinder the DTO's ability to access their product, money, trafficking infrastructure, and their enabling means.⁵⁴

The fifth priority action focuses on drug trafficking and DTOs facilitation of other transnational threats. As with the fourth priority, this portion of the strategy maintains the focus on DTO leadership, production, and infrastructure.⁵⁵ The intent is that by collecting and sharing the maximum amount of intelligence on the network as a whole, targeting effectiveness increases. By focusing as well on DTO links to other transnational threats, the U.S. maintains vigilant watch on the potential for the Mexican DTO-terror nexus discussed earlier.

The final priority action is the building of international capacity, cooperation, and partnerships.⁵⁶ Linked to the first priority action of acknowledging the U.S. share of the responsibility for the problems associated with DTOs, the final action emphasizes the importance of working with Mexico to defeat DTOs. Emphasis is placed on building the legal and law enforcement capabilities of international partners, including Mexico, to bolster the rule of law.⁵⁷ Finally, this priority action finalizes the law enforcement cooperation outlined in the U.S.-Mexico 21st Century Border Action Plan, specifically joint assessment of threats and focus for U.S. and Mexican law enforcement operations.⁵⁸

The 2012 National Drug Control Strategy continues earlier Obama administration's efforts emphasizing the reduction of demand for drugs within the U.S. as the focus of the strategy. Prevention and treatment receive the most funding, \$10.1 billion, with law enforcement, interdiction, and international programs receiving \$15.1 billion combined.⁵⁹ Additionally, the strategy calls for improved intelligence and information sharing from the National to local levels. Finally, the strategy calls for the strengthening of the strategic partnership with Mexico, improving understanding of

DTOs weaknesses, disrupting drug trafficking in the transit zones, and targeting DTO leadership and finances.⁶⁰

There is little argument that the demand for illegal drugs in the U.S. is a significant driving force behind DTOs violence and drug-related crime. As President Obama stated in a joint press conference with Mexican President Calderon in 2011,

As part of our new drug control strategy, we are focused on reducing the demand for drugs through education, prevention and treatment...We are very mindful that the battle President Calderón is fighting...is not just his battle; it's also ours. We have to take responsibility just as he is.⁶¹

In the effort to reduce demand, the intent of the U.S. strategy is to provide a focus on prevention of drug use in the youth population, increase prevention awareness in the workplace, and better help communities develop and implement prevention practices. The U.S. is reported to now have CIA and ex-military members inside Mexico. These officials provide support directly to Mexican security officials in “fusion intelligence centers”, modeled after highly effective centers of the same name operated by the U.S. military during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁶² These efforts are designed to assist Mexican officials collect information on and subsequently target DTOs. The use of intelligence agents and former members of the military finesses the prohibitions in Mexican law against foreign military and law enforcement agents from operating inside Mexico.⁶³ Most importantly, it provides the support and expertise badly needed on the Mexican side of the border and increases the bilateral and shared responsibility of reducing DTO violence on both sides of the border. Finally, the strategy calls for the continued implementation of a revised Merida Initiative, the U.S. counter-drug assistance package to Mexico.

The Merida Initiative, originally a three-year \$1.4 billion plan set to expire in 2010, continues to fund the fight against organized crime. Revised by Mexico and the U.S. in 2010, the now \$1.9 billion “Beyond Merida’ Initiative seeks to: “1) disrupt organized criminal groups; 2) institutionalize the rule of law; 3) build a 21st century border; and 4) build strong and resilient communities.”⁶⁴ Specifically, the Beyond Merida Initiative provides funding for aircraft used by security forces conducting counter-narcotic operations, rule of law training, law enforcement training, non-intrusive inspection equipment, and a project to assist Mexico’s development of crime prevention policy at all levels of government.

Beyond Merida “focuses more on institution-building than on technological transfers.”⁶⁵ Much like in Afghanistan, where the Afghan and U.S. governments implement a strategy against a threat that includes insurgents, corruption at all levels, drug trafficking, and organized crime, the initiative goes well beyond simply outfitting Mexico with technology. Hardware, such as planes and inspection equipment, can do little by themselves to stop the effects of the DTOs without the institutional training and corrupt-free systems in place required to capture, incarcerate, and prosecute the criminals. Simply removing a high-level leader or low-level fighter does not necessarily end the violence, and in fact may prolong and worsen the very conflict forces and governments are trying to end.

Due to Mexican federal law and past territorial and political conflicts between Mexico and the U.S., Mexico has lingering concerns about an “active U.S. military presence in Mexico”⁶⁶ leading to a rather small role for U.S. armed forces under the original Merida Initiative. This is not to say there is a lack of a military-to-military

relationship between the two countries. Initially, the Department of Defense focused on “overseeing the procurement and delivery of Merida-funded equipment for Mexican military forces.”⁶⁷ Through Foreign Military Financing accounts not funded through Merida, the Department of Defense assists Mexico with “training, equipment, information and intelligence sharing and analysis, liaison personnel and other categories.”⁶⁸ Additionally, open source reporting indicates that the U.S. is now operating unmanned drones along the border and deep into Mexico to identify drug trafficking routes and DTOs.⁶⁹

Other non-Merida programs include, among other initiatives, development assistance through the U.S. Agency for International Development focused on rule of law. The U.S. Department of State provides military training and counterterrorism assistance. And through the Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy, the intent is to complement Merida through intelligence and information sharing, halting drugs at and between the ports of entry along the border, dismantle DTOs, improve U.S.-Mexico joint counterdrug efforts, stem the flow of weapons and bulk cash, and develop communities resistant to criminal activities.⁷⁰

Elements of National Power and the Way Ahead

In order to achieve the aforementioned end of reducing DTOs from a national security threat to one managed as a public safety issue, the U.S. must use the traditional DIME⁷¹ elements of national power, as well as the legal, law enforcement, and intelligence instruments of power to ensure a balanced and effective approach. With the informational element of national power interwoven throughout all U.S. efforts, the diplomatic and economic elements take the lead. The military element retains a vital but smaller role in the overall strategy due to Mexican national law and the criminal

nature of the threat. Simply stated, policy objectives will be secured by a strategy that makes best use of the appropriate elements and instruments of power, which in this case, given the criminal nature of DTO activity, are diplomatic, economic, financial, legal, law enforcement, and intelligence activities.

Diplomatic cooperation at the highest levels, starting with Presidents Obama and Pena Nieto is vital to ensuring a bilateral approach to this effort. Emphasis from both leaders concerning the two countries working together to reduce demand, reduce DTOs power, influence, and reach, as well as targeting of the DTOs' support infrastructure and networks, are all vital and essential components of a strong long-term strategy. In alignment with the U.S. National Drug Control Strategy, reducing the demand for illegal drugs within the U.S. must remain a well-funded priority that spans administrations. The national government must assist state and local governments and communities with funding, implementing, and maintaining prevention and treatment programs. The U.S. government, working with legal and law enforcement communities, should implement legislation designed not to legalize drugs and drug use, but rather to emphasize counter drug use programs, and to stop the cycle of drugs and drug violence imported into the U.S. Finally, the U.S. government should expand bilateral agreements to fight DTOs, as well as fund legal, law enforcement, and intelligence support to Mexican institutions. The U.S. must work shoulder to shoulder with Mexico on these initiatives. Only by sharing intelligence on DTOs, strengthening Mexican law enforcement capacity and capability, strengthening the rule of law to capture and incarcerate, and strengthening transparency to reduce corruption can DTO influence truly begin to be reduced.

The informational element of national power must be woven into the majority of actions taken by Mexico and the U.S. The cost of employing the informational element of power is relatively low compared to the military element, for example. There are numerous methods of employment such as press releases, social media, and mass media interviews with leaders from the Federal to community level discussing the affects of illegal drug use and the fight against DTOs. And there are numerous opportunities, such as state and diplomatic visits with Mexico, an ongoing social media campaign, and federally assisted programs at the community level that can assist in ensuring information that the population remains informed. Leadership must engage and inform the Mexican and U.S. populations as well as elected officials on the negative impacts of DTOs on every citizen and level of government in order to build a greater consensus to stop DTOs. From the focus on demand, prevention, and treatment, to state visits by Presidents Obama and Pena Nieto, to the Merida Initiative, the informational element must effectively engage and inform to ensure everyone understands the importance of stopping DTOs.

One potential threat of defining DTOs as insurgent organizations could be a significant increase in the U.S. military element of national power designed to target DTOs. In addition to the aforementioned Mexican legal restrictions that do not allow foreign militaries to operate within Mexico, President Pena Nieto announced he is taking a decidedly different strategy to counter violence in Mexico. Whereas former President Calderon used the Mexican military in a joint effort with law enforcement to target DTOs⁷², Pena Nieto announced plans for a new law enforcement agency built to focus on reducing crime against citizens as opposed to targeting DTO leaders.⁷³ The new

strategy does not specifically state the role of the Mexican military in the fight against DTOs, but Pena Nieto does intend to phase out the role of the military in fighting organized crime.⁷⁴ In order to ensure both countries approach the problem in a unified manner, and in the effort to not escalate the violence above current levels⁷⁵, increasing the role of the U.S. military would not be the prudent way to stop DTOs. The U.S. should continue to maximize military support in ways that are not high profile and which attract as little attention as possible. Instead of increased U.S. troop presence along the border, increased use should be made of drones and other intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance means that continuously feed the combined Mexico-U.S. fusion efforts. The recent reports of intelligence professionals and contractors with military backgrounds working directly with Mexican military, intelligence, law enforcement, and legal experts are encouraging and these efforts must continue in the long-term. The model for military presence along the border should remain Joint Task Force North's (JTF North) support to Homeland Security. JTF North "coordinates military support to law enforcement agencies in order to anticipate, detect, deter, prevent, and defeat transnational threats to the homeland."⁷⁶ Operations to support local law enforcement agencies do not include large numbers of troops along the border, rather they provide additional and unique operational, intelligence, and engineering capabilities that law enforcement may not have in large numbers, if at all. Finally, as mentioned above, the Merida Initiative authorizes the U.S. military to provide the acquisition capability for Mexico to obtain equipment such as helicopters, x-ray machines, and night vision capabilities that directly support Mexican security and military operations to identify and stop DTO operations.

If financial gain is the objective for DTOs, the U.S. must use every means possible to limit DTO access to their funds. This economic effort requires diplomatic, informational, and legal methods to implement fully. As discussed above, the U.S. must work with public and private, domestic and international financial institutions to raise awareness of the indicators of DTOs moving funds, and install a system allowing for immediate notification when indicators are identified. With Mexico and the U.S. targeting DTOs movement of bulk cash, DTOs will find ways to move profits in other methods. These methods could include prepaid credit and debit cards, digital currencies, and online role-playing games that allow movement of funds.⁷⁷ The U.S. must work with the private sector to develop the means to identify and stop these new methods of transferring funds. Already in place, the Beyond Merida Initiative is the essential instrument of power within the economic element of national power. Off to a slow start in 2008 but revitalized in 2010, and providing close to \$2 billion to Mexico since implementation, this is an effort that the U.S. congress must continue to fund and enforce if institutional reforms are to take hold in Mexico.

Conclusion

Mexico is a partner like no other to the U.S. Our shared border, as well as long-standing historical, social, cultural, and economic ties, mandate that the two countries work together to reduce and eventually end DTO influence in both countries. With a presence estimated in more than 1000 U.S. cities⁷⁸ and supplying the majority of illegal drugs in the U.S, Mexican DTOs create significant negative social and economic impacts on America.

The Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime and the National Drug Control Strategy are designed to employ all elements of national power in the campaign

against DTOs. Using the diplomatic and informational elements, the U.S. focuses on demand, prevention, and treatment of illegal drug use. Militarily, the U.S. continues to provide Mexico with equipment and training through the Beyond Merida Initiative. Additionally, the U.S. military supports law enforcement efforts along the U.S.-Mexico border and emphasizes sharing of intelligence with Mexican intelligence and law enforcement officials. Economically, the U.S. is committed to ensuring private institutions are aware of indicators of DTO financial transactions and that they are developing new methods of stopping DTO financial transactions. Finally, the U.S. recommitted to funding Beyond Merida in order to contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to the counter-drug fight.

By categorizing DTOs within the definition of transnational criminal organizations, the U.S. identifies DTOs as threats to national interests. Categorizing DTOs as criminal organizations with financial ends and not insurgents or terror groups is the right first step to implementing a whole of government approach to fighting DTOs. Acknowledging part of the responsibility for DTOs and working bilaterally with Mexico are significant second and third steps toward reducing DTO impacts to manageable levels. The U.S. is on the right track with this whole of government strategy to fight the DTOs as ensure the safety and well being of every American.

Endnotes

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